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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (MBENEDICT), DRL (MDAVIS)

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SUBJECT: EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ALBANIAN PRE-TRIAL DETENTION
CONDITIONS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. A DRL-funded project to improve conditions at one of Albania's largest prisons was launched June 7. This project will provide training to prison guards and administration officials. Complementing the project's launch, the Ministry of Justice disseminated a new internal regulation order to improve the treatment of women and minors in pre-trial detention facilities. These events come on the heels of an amendment to the Albanian Penal Code defining torture. END SUMMARY.

PRISON ALREADY IMPROVED, PROJECT WILL BOOST MOMENTUM

¶2. (U) On June 7, PolOff participated in the launching ceremony of a DRL-funded project aimed at improving the treatment of pre-trial detainees in one of Albania's largest prisons. Implemented by the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), with technical assistance from the Dutch Prison system, the 12-month, \$50,000 project will provide training on human rights and prisoner handling techniques consistent with international norms and standards.

¶3. (U) Jan van den Brand, Coordinator for Foreign Affairs at the Dutch Prison Service, said that in the last two years the situation at the Lezhe prison had gone from a tense environment where he was not allowed free access to all areas of the prison to one where he was allowed virtually unfettered access to all parts of the prison, where the operating climate had greatly improved, and where juvenile convicts had been completely separated from adults.

¶4. (U) The prison currently houses 160 pre-trial detainees and 530 convicts, figures that he cited as being the maximum capacity for this all-male facility. He said that he was concerned about plans to increase the number of convicts to 700, a situation which, in itself, would compromise the advances in prisoner treatment that had already been made.

¶5. (U) According to Rrok Nikaj, Lezhe Prison Warden, the vast majority of prisoners there were convicted of murder, and many of these were blood feud killings. (A centuries old Albanian form of "honor killings.") He said that the lingering blood feud culture presented a challenge to prison management to protect the safety of the prisoners, forcing him to separate and isolate combating parties.

NEW REGULATIONS AIMED AT STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS

16. (U) Edlira Papavangjeli, AHC Project Coordinator, said that the GOA Minister of Justice issued on June 6 a new directive regarding the treatment and handling of all pre-trial detainees. The new directive improved upon its 2003 predecessor by increasing the minimum per prisoner space, formalizing a grievance mechanism for all prisoners, separating minors and women from other prisoners, and addressing the unique educational, social, and psychological needs of prisoners. The GOA further sought to improve Albania's human rights framework with an amendment to the Albanian Penal Code that clearly defined the concept of torture. Passed on May 31 by the Council of Ministers, the measure awaits final adoption by the Parliament.

PRISON AN IMPORTANT ECONOMIC ASSET

17. (U) Prefect of Lezhe, Njazi Reci, told PolOff that Lezhe prison was one of the largest employers in the district, employing many guards, cooks, and maintenance staff. He noted that the prison also was an important consumer of food supplies and other goods furnished by local small businesses in the district.

ZATE